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with

Dr. D



 Printer Friendly



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Health Tip: FAQs about Salmonella

Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration lifted the warning regarding eating tomatoes that were thought to be responsible for the recent Salmonella outbreak. Attention has now shifted to the jalapeño pepper as the likely culprit. Since concerns remain regarding the risk of becoming ill from food contaminated with Salmonella, it is still relevant to know about Salmonella and diseases that it can cause in humans.



What is *Salmonella*? *Salmonella* is a type of bacteria that can live in the intestines of animals and humans. There are a number of strains of *Salmonella* bacteria and one is even responsible for causing Typhoid Fever. The particular strain of *Salmonella* that is responsible for the current epidemic is known as *Salmonella Saintpaul*.

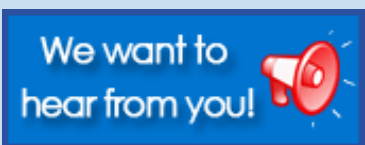
What is Salmonellosis? An infection with *Salmonella* bacteria is called salmonellosis. Symptoms include diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps. The illness usually lasts 4 to

7 days and most people recover without treatment. In some instances, the diarrhea becomes very severe, resulting in dehydration. The infection can also spread from the intestine into the blood

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stream to other parts of the body. The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

How is Salmonella spread? *Salmonella* live in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals, including birds, pet reptiles, dogs and cats, pigs and cattle. Infected humans, contaminated water, raw dairy products and chicken eggs can also serve as reservoirs for spread of the illness. The illness can develop when the Salmonella bacteria is ingested. This could occur in a variety of ways. Eating contaminated food, particularly poultry, meat and eggs is one of the most common ways. Food may also become contaminated by the hands of an infected food handler who did not wash their hands with soap after using the bathroom. With the current epidemic, contaminated tomatoes and peppers have both been suspected although recently, tomatoes were cleared. Infection can also occur after handling pet reptiles that harbor the bacteria or even after cleaning up after your dog.

What is the treatment for Salmonellosis? In those with a normal immune system, Salmonella infections usually resolve after 4 to 7 days and no treatment other than oral hydration is necessary. When severe diarrhea and dehydration complicates the illness, hospitalization and administration of intravenous fluids may be required. There are antibiotics that are effective against Salmonella however; indiscriminate use can result in the development of antibiotic resistance. Use of antibiotics is typically reserved for when the infection travels outside of the intestines to other parts of the body.

How can Salmonellosis be prevented? Be sure that high risk foods such as poultry, ground beef and eggs are cooked thoroughly. Don't eat or drink foods containing raw eggs (Caesar salad dressing, homemade ice cream, etc.) or raw (unpasteurized) milk. Kitchen work surfaces and utensils should be washed with soap and water if they came in contact with potentially contaminated food. Since infants, the elderly, and those with immune compromise are particularly at risk from salmonellosis, be especially careful with their food preparation. Hands should be washed with soap after



handling reptiles, birds, or baby chicks, and after contact with pet feces. At this time, the FDA is advising people in high risk populations such as elderly persons, infants and people with impaired immune systems to avoid eating raw jalapeño and raw serrano peppers. Consumers may continue to eat canned jalapeños and serranos processed in a commercial food-processing facility, or foods that contain them; for example, the canned processed jalapeños and processed salsas sold in grocery stores.

The FDA is continuing to investigate the current Salmonella outbreak in order to confirm the source of contaminated food. This is an extremely labor intensive process, since fresh produce can become contaminated at any point along the supply chain, from the field or greenhouse where it is grown to distribution points to food preparation in restaurants and homes. I'll keep Health Tips readers up to date on the latest developments in FDA investigation and recommendations.

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